

Dealing with Post Trumpatic Stress Disorder What To Do When Someone You Love Voted For Trump

By Joe Kort, Ph.D., CST

These are trying, scary times for LGBTQ people. We are seeing increasing divisiveness. Every day on Facebook I see people blocking and unfriending each other, and I must admit I have done the same. A lot of this comes from people not hearing each other, attacking each other or not truly engaging in dialogue. Other times it is the only thing to do, and I fully understand that.

Let me be clear: I didn't vote for Donald Trump. I voted for Hillary Clinton. My issue is, and always has been, protecting my rights as a gay man. I have my reasons for why I vote the way I do just like everyone else does. However, not everyone is willing to listen to my reasons even though I am willing to listen to theirs.

Here is a typical exchange that occurs between myself who voted for Clinton and a loved one or friend of mine who voted for Trump:

Friend: "Why did you vote for Clinton?"

Me: "Because I have to protect my rights as a member of the LGBTQ community. We now have a president who has chosen to surround himself with people who are against marriage equality and for "religious freedom" (to discriminate against LGBTQ people), having chosen a vice president notorious for his past anti-gay positions and actions, and a cabinet that has been described as "[a who's who of homophobia](#)."

Friend: Well, I don't know about those things.

Me: "No problem. I am happy to tell you these things so you are informed."

Friend: "They shouldn't get involved in people's rights like that. They should just stay with what needs to get done"

Me: "Well, they are getting deeply involved with people's rights."

Sadly, this is where the discussion usually ends, and I feel as though my concerns have been dismissed as unimportant.

For eight years of the Obama administration, the LGBTQ community was feeling hope that long-standing discrimination in housing, the workplace, the marketplace, adoption, schools, and more, was finally beginning to fade away, and that America was shedding its prejudice.

Now we are reeling in fear and disbelief, Trumpatized, as some are calling it. Some people saw this coming, but I have spoken with those in the gay community who even voted for Trump, preferring to see only the issues of the economy and the need for a radical change in politics, selectively ignoring the unbridled undercurrent of hate riding into office on his coattails.

So how to deal with this? How do we avoid being swept up in panic and divisiveness, and the fruitless attempts to point out to others how wrong and hurtful these views and actions are to us? How do we find hope amid the darkness?

In therapeutic practice, especially in couples' therapy, we employ techniques for dealing with seemingly intractable differences and opposing viewpoints:

Differentiation

The first is a psychological term and process called "differentiation." It is how I teach couples and individuals to deal with a someone who doesn't agree with them, how to live with these differences. It's about not collapsing one's viewpoint into the other's, or insisting someone comes around to yours'. In every relationship, there are differences. If we care about each other, the question becomes how are we going to make this work? As I said, I have friends I dearly love who voted for Trump, and I am not willing to throw those friendships out because of it. There is a line, however, I will not cross. If the relationship becomes abusive wherein someone begins attacking my reasons for how I vote or minimizing them. We all need to maintain healthy boundaries, and you need to know where your line is.

Active Listening

Most of us are in a monologue, not a dialogue. We are not willing to hear the other side when it doesn't agree or align with ours. Active Listening involves really hearing what the other person has to say, and trying to understand them without thinking about correcting the other person or what you are going to say next. If there's one thing we should have learned over this past impassioned election cycle, it's that arguing, stating facts, and bluster changes no one's mind. If we're going to be in relationship, we must let it go. And if we listen deeply to someone—and in turn are listened to—we begin to get a glimpse of the person inside that is still our friend and loved one.

You can't meet an adult problem with your 8-year-old inner child

Politics and the way people react are very personal. If you're at all self-aware, you have realized that you have many people living inside of you. For instance, you will sometimes find that you react to someone as if they were a parent or family member who didn't validate you. Your defensive child has come out, still frustrated over not having his voice heard. You may even be reacting out of unresolved issues you have with a former friend or partner. This is when you need to put your therapeutic hat on and ask yourself, "Why am I having this reaction? Am I perhaps trying to resolve something from childhood?" Your 8-year-old inner child is not up to this challenge. In such moments, you need to call forth the adult in you, the one who is not diminished by another's viewpoint, the one who can stand tall in his own convictions without having to defend or futilely try to convince the other person. In this persona, you can realize that this is the other person's issue; it's about them, not you.

Chances are if someone senses that you are sincere in wanting to know what makes them tick, why they feel strongly about something, they are going to see a person in you that they can live with or appreciate. That's how differentiation works.

Where is your limit in tolerating differences?

This is very personal and I cannot tell you where your line is nor should be. For me, right now the line is if a person puts down my decision, attacks me, or minimizes my choices. I do not do this to others and I expect that others will not do this to me. I understand that for some people just the choice of voting for Trump is enough to break off ties with another person. My thoughts are to at least try to understand where they are coming from by hearing them. Then ask the same from them. If they are unwilling to hear you or agree to disagree, then it makes sense to take action and let them go. It is abusive when someone can't hold onto your reality and tries to change you when you are clear you do not accept their attempt.

Get politically involved with volunteering, peaceful protests and other empowering actions

Finally, when feelings of fear and frustration threaten to overwhelm, I recommend becoming *politically active*. Getting increasingly upset, reading and talking about what is going on and doing nothing about it is unhealthy and paralyzing. Doing something, anything, can help. Leading up to and after the recent women's marches around the world, did you see how so many women who had been feeling Trumpatized and discouraged expressed the powerful healing they felt joining together with their sisters and marching for their causes? Get involved in organizations that are fighting for what you care about. Being active isn't just blocking someone on Facebook, or sniping at those whose opinions are driving you crazy. If you're only getting the information and opinions that fit into your bubble, you are further fostering divisiveness that is sickening our culture ... and your own psyche. Of course, some people are toxic and should be avoided, but most are not. Stay open to possibilities of connection, but be aware of and honor your boundaries.

And finally, though things look rather dark as of now, the truth is we really don't know how things will turn out. We may not be able to affect many of the scary things going on out there today, and they may even be resolved in ways we can't foresee. What we can affect, however, is how we deal with others, and how we care for ourselves and seek activities that will ameliorate our fears. These are the battles for which we must reserve our energy, battles that might actually be won.